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SNAPSHOT

OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS OF

LAOS



Program information

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief introduction to the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The information is based on a desk review of publicly available documents on CRVS in Laos. Among other things, the report presents:

- Background information on the country;
- Selected indicators relevant for CRVS improvement;
- Stakeholders' activities; and
- Resources available and needed to strengthen CRVS systems.

Brief country profile

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia, is located at the heart of the Indochinese peninsula. Laos borders Myanmar and China to the northwest, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the southeast, and Thailand to the west and southwest.

Laos is divided into 17 provinces (*khoueng*) and the capital, Vientiane (Nakhon Louang Viangchan). Provinces are further divided into 148 districts (*muang*) and 8,416 villages (*ban*). There are 1,540 urban villages, 6,031 rural villages with roads, and 843 rural villages without roads.



Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

- Land area: 236,800 km²
- Population: 7,231,210
- Capital city: Vientiane
- Official working language: Lao
- Ministry responsible for civil registration: Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)
- Civil registration agency: Department of Citizen Management
- National statistical office: Lao Statistics Bureau



CRVS dimensions

Births

Completeness of birth registration	38.7% (2018) ¹
Children under 5 years of age whose births were reported as registered	73% (2017) ²
Births attended by skilled health personnel	64% (2017) ³
Women aged 15–49 who received antenatal care from a skilled provider	78% (2017) ⁴
DPT1 immunization coverage among 1-year-olds	61% (2017) ⁵
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	22 (2020) ⁶
Total fertility rate (live births per woman)	2.6 (2020) ⁷
Adolescent fertility rate (per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years)	65 (2018) ⁸
Population under age 15 years	32% (2015) ⁹

Deaths

Completeness of death registration	36.1% (2018) ¹⁰
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	7 (2018) ¹¹
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	40 (2017) ¹²
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	46 (2017) ¹³
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	18 (2017) ¹⁴

Marriages and divorces

Marriage registration rate	Not available
Women aged 20–24 first married or in union before age 15	7.1% (2017) ¹⁵
Women aged 20–24 first married or in union before age 18	32.7% (2017) ¹⁶
Divorce registration rate	Not available

Vital statistics, including causes-of-death data

Compilation and dissemination of civil registration-based statistics	Not available
Medically certified causes-of-death data	Not available

Civil registration system

Legislative framework

Laos has three main laws pertaining to CRVS that establish citizens' basic rights and requirements for registering vital events:

Family Law No. 07/90/SPA (1990), amended in 2008, establishes stipulations of first name, last name, and nationality, as well as children's rights. Other vital events, such as marriage registration, divorce, and adoption, are also outlined.

Family Registration Law 03/SPA (1991), which was amended in 2009 and 2018, regulates the registration of families, births, disappearances, deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, changes of first name or family name, and other vital events.

Statistics Law No. 03/NA (2010), amended in 2017, defines rules, regulations, and measures regarding the organization, management, and inspection of the statistical activities that are systematically established and developed, modernized, strengthened, and efficient, in order to assure comprehensiveness, accuracy, timeliness, and consistency with facts of the statistical data.

The development of integrated CRVS and identity management systems follows the *Law on Protection of Electronic Data No. 012/NA* (2017) and other laws and regulations covering information and communications technology (ICT).

Management, organization, and operations

Civil registration is the responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). It works closely with seven other line ministries:

- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Justice;

- Ministry of Public Security;
- Ministry of Education and Sport;
- Ministry of Planning and Investment;
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and
- Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

MoHA's Department of Citizen Management is developing an electronic civil registration system (eCRVS) to be rolled out nationwide by 2022.

National CRVS systems coordination mechanisms

The Citizen Management Inter-ministerial Coordinating Committee is chaired by the prime minister. It makes policy recommendations on civil registration and meets once a year. The committee reports to MoHA and the Lao Statistics Bureau and brings together the seven ministries listed above.

Administrative-level registration centres

Based on the *Family Registration Law* (amended in 2018),

- the Department of Citizen Management of MoHA is responsible for registering changes in nationality;
- the Provincial Office of Home Affairs is responsible for registering marriages and divorces between Lao citizens and foreigners, aliens, or stateless persons; and
- the District Office of Home Affairs is responsible for registering births, deaths, marriages, divorces, changes of first name or family name, and migration.

Accessibility of civil registration services

Civil registration services are available and open to all citizens nationwide at the central, provincial, and district level.



Registration of vital events

Birth registration

Under the *Family Registration Law*, births are registered in the following ways:

- When a child is born in a hospital or other healthcare facility, the facility issues the birth notification form within seven days of the child's birth. The father or mother or family representative then notifies the village administrative authority before getting a notification for birth registration.
- When a child is born outside a healthcare facility, the father or mother or family representative notifies the village administrative authority where they are residing within 15 days of the birth.
- Once they receive the birth notification, the father or mother or family representative (or the person who is taking care of the newborn) gets a notification for birth registration from the District Office of Home Affairs where they are residing within 30 days of receiving the notification form.
- The birth registration is processed by the District Office of Home Affairs or the registration unit of the overseas representative office of Lao PDR. The office records the contents of the birth notification and the personal identification number in the family registration book and the electronic database. It then issues a birth certificate within five business days.
- The birth is then registered in the family registration book with the Headquarters of Public Security at the district level where the applicant resides.

Death registration

- When a person dies in a hospital or other healthcare facility, the facility issues the death notification form within five business days. The family representative then notifies the village administrative authority before registering the death.

- If a person dies outside a healthcare facility, the family representative must notify the village administrative authority where the person died within five business days.
- After receiving a death notification, the village chief issues a death notification form within five days. Where the cause of death is unclear or the death is caused by a dangerous communicable disease, a public health officer or police officer is notified right away. The death notification form is not issued until the officer's conclusion is made. If the deceased is an alien, foreigner, or stateless person, the officer notifies the Ministry of Foreign Affairs right away.
- After receiving the death notification, the family representative notifies the District Office of Home Affairs where the family representative is residing or temporarily staying, within 15 days from the date of death notification.
- The death registration is processed with the District Office of Home Affairs or the registration unit of the overseas representative office of Lao PDR. It records the contents of the death notification in the family registration book and the electronic database and issues a death certificate within five business days. After receiving a death certificate, it notifies the Headquarters of Public Security at the district level where the deceased is registered to make the change in the family registration book.

Marriage registration

The registration of marriages between Lao citizens in Laos is processed with the District Office of Home Affairs where the couple or either party is residing.

Backlog of unregistered births

No information is available.

Sample registration forms

Registration forms are under review. Samples of the birth registration form and birth certificate are available online: getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Session18-Lao.pptx.

Forms are available at village offices, the District Office of Home Affairs, the Provincial Office of Home Affairs, and MoHA's website: moha.gov.la.

Registration fee

The following are free of charge:

- Birth registration and birth certificates for children under 18;
- Death registration; and
- Death certificates.

For other types of registration, the applicant is required to pay a modest fee and service charge in keeping with the president's decree, which is enforced from time to time.

Vital statistics system

Vital statistics

Lao Statistics Bureau is the state agency that collects and publishes statistics on the economy, population, and society of Laos. Vital statistics reports are not based on information from the civil registration system directly, because it is not able to produce accurate statistics. Data that can be used to process vital statistics are communicated through these channels:

- Village chiefs send vital statistics information to district authorities four times a year;
- District authorities send district aggregated data to the provincial authority twice a year; and
- Provincial authorities send provincial data to MoHA once a year.

The main source for producing vital statistics is the population census and survey, whose results are

shared in statistical yearbooks, on the Lao Statistics Bureau website, and in standalone reports. The latest such report is the Lao Social Indicator Survey II. The survey, which was done in 2017, is based on the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 platform. The survey provides statistically sound and internationally comparable data that is needed to develop evidence-based policies and programs and to monitor progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Causes of death

About 45,000 to 50,000 deaths occur each year, yet only about 7 percent of them occur in health facilities. Even for deaths in health facilities, no standard death notification form is used across all hospitals, and none of the forms conform to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s international standards. With WHO support, the Ministry of Health is working to improve cause-of-death statistics for deaths in health facilities.

A new death notification and medical certification of cause-of-death form is being piloted in all central hospitals in the capital, Vientiane. However, this can improve mortality data for only a fraction of deaths each year. While there is a formal system for notifying a village chief of community deaths, cause-of-death data is not accurate and is not consolidated for national statistics. Also, there is no formal exchange of information with the health sector to get cause-of-death information. The Ministry of Health and MoHA are trying to share vital information on births and deaths through a data-sharing agreement.

The quality of cause-of-death information is a major challenge. The process for determining cause of death is not standardized. Not all health facilities codify cause of death using ICD-10 standards, and only some central hospitals use District Health Information Software (DHIS2). Data entry to DHIS2 in some districts and health centres is not always correct or is not complete, and there are delays in reporting the information.

Based on data from 2017 that were collected using methodology that the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation developed, these are the leading causes of death in Laos:

- Stroke (13 percent);
- Ischemic heart disease (12.3 percent);
- Lower respiratory infections (8.4 percent);
- Neonatal disorders (7.7 percent);
- Road injuries (3.7 percent);
- Cirrhosis and other chronic liver diseases (3.5 percent);
- Diarrheal diseases (3.4 percent); and
- Tuberculosis (3.4 percent).

Table 1: Information collected on causes of death in relation to the location where the death occurred.

Cause-of-death information	Information collected	
	Yes	No
For deaths occurring in health facilities	X	
For natural deaths occurring in the communities	X	
For non-natural deaths occurring in the communities	X	

Digitization

Computerization

Civil registration in Laos is paper-based, and the process for sending registration data to the various authorities, including MoHA, is long. This means that registration data is not aggregated centrally. To prove their registered information, where required, people present registration certificates that they get from the place where the information was originally registered. Without digital processing, up-to-date data sharing through interoperable ICT systems is not possible.

After extensive consultations and analysis, in March 2020 a US\$25 million CRVS project was launched with support from the World Bank. It will support a complete overhaul of the national CRVS system. As of mid-2020, a central database of civil registration records, the Civil Management Information System (CMIS), is in the piloting stage in three provinces and 31 districts. A key component is to digitize business processes and roll out CMIS. MoHA will operate CMIS to make it easier to manage information for citizens and residents. CMIS will enable digital processing of vital events notifications, registration, and certification of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, change of first name or family name, change of nationality, and registration of migration.

Online registration services at health facilities

Civil registration services are not offered in health facilities, but their role remains important. They provide birth notification and medical certification for cause of death, which is required for birth and death registration. The health sector sends these notifications using its own forms. When CMIS is launched, this data will be shared electronically between DHIS2 and CMIS. At this time, all government health facilities report through DHIS2; the Ministry of Health will gradually roll out the capturing of birth and death notification data on DHIS2, which can then be shared with CMIS.

Mobile technology application

CMIS is an eCRVS system that will be launched for general public access via a mobile application and a web-based application.

Unique identification number

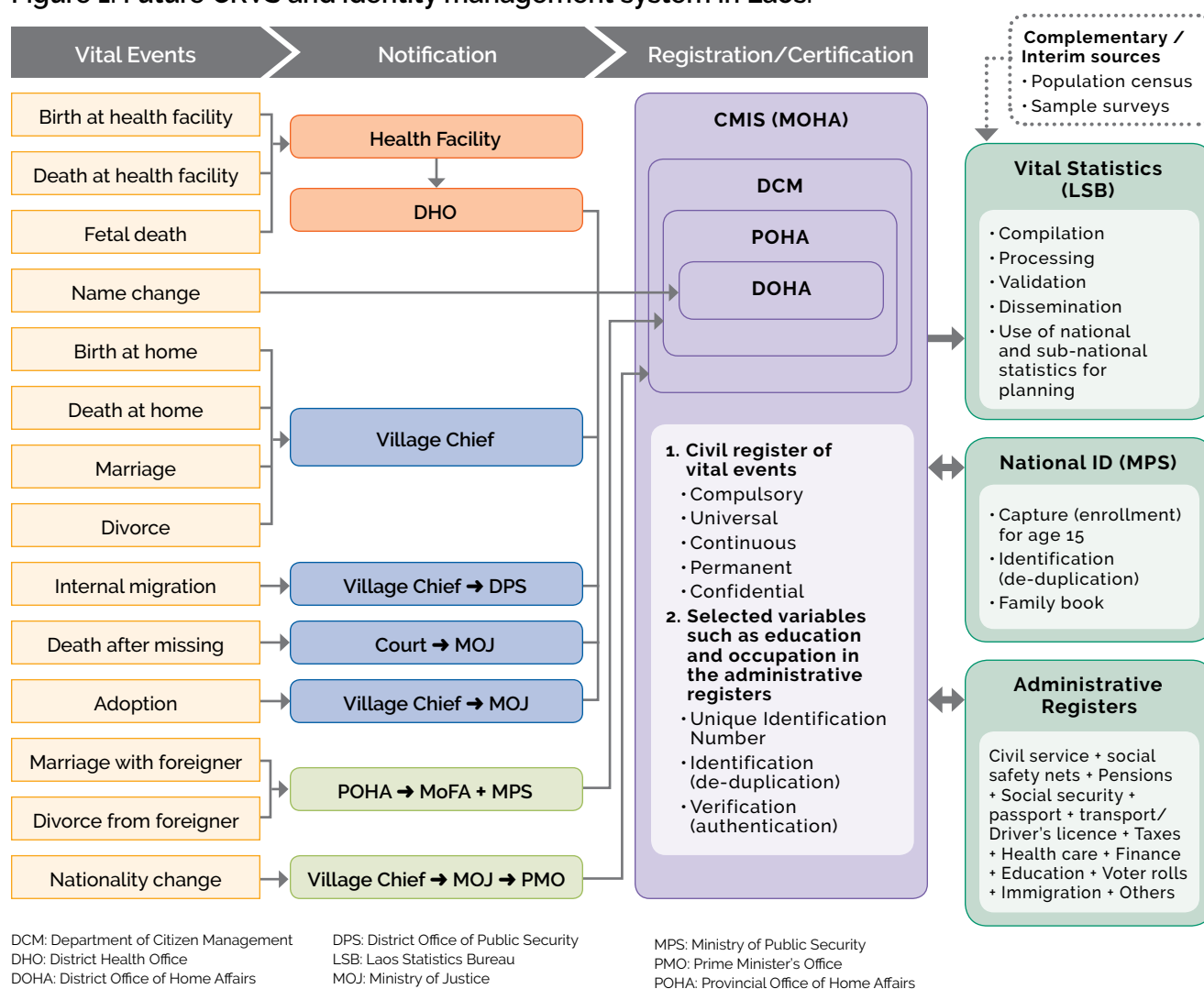
CMIS will automatically generate a unique identification number (UIN) when a birth is registered. Once the system is fully operational, it will enable various processes:

- A UIN will be assigned at birth on the birth certificate. The same number will be used at age 15 and above for the national identity card.

- Information from registered vital records will be sent to the Lao Statistics Bureau and to the Ministry of Public Security for household records and identity management.
- ICT systems will be interoperable with the registers of other sectors. For example, CMIS will be interoperable with the database for the family book and national identity card that the Ministry of Public Security manages and with the DHIS2 database that the Ministry of Health manages.

The system is designed to mirror the modern holistic approach to CRVS, identity management, and management of legal identity from birth until death. An overview of the digitized flow of registered identity and other vital events data is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Future CRVS and identity management system in Laos.



Source: A strategy for improving CRVS in Lao PDR¹⁷



Digitization of historical civil registration records

Digital vital events records exist for only a small volume of events registered since CMIS was launched. Paper archives of registered vital events at the Provincial Office of Home Affairs and the District Office of Home Affairs are not yet being systematically digitized.

Link with identification system

Starting in 2015, a chip-enabled national identity card is being issued for everyone who is age 15 and up. From the beginning, citizens applying for a national identity card for the first time used a birth certificate to prove their identity. Informants who are registering vital events must also have a national identity card. When CMIS is set up and CRVS is integrated under and managed by MoHA, CRVS and identity management records will be directly linked. A UIN will have the ability to share/verify data between the two systems as part of civil registration and identity card processes.

Interface with other sectors and operations

MoHA is responsible for developing CMIS, which will allow services for citizens to incorporate vital events into ICT processes and data. This will also make it possible to share information among the registers of several sectors. For instance, CMIS will be interoperable with the database for the family book and national identity card that the Ministry of Public Security manages and with the DHIS2 database that the Ministry of Health manages. Other registers will probably also become linked to CMIS, such as civil services, social safety nets, pensions, social security, passport, transportation/driver's licence, taxes, finance, education, voter rolls, and immigration.

Once the centralized database is up and running, monthly, quarterly, and annual vital statistics will be produced, shared, and used.

Improvement initiatives and external support

Improvement plan and budget

In 2012, the Lao Statistics Bureau – with support from UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, WHO, and Plan International – did a comprehensive assessment of the CRVS system in Laos. The assessment aimed to produce detailed information on the current systems for recording vital events and providing individuals and families with evidence of identity and family relationships. It concluded that the family registration system was not strong enough to develop and implement a well-functioning system of civil registration and related vital statistics.

The main recommendations included:

- Adopting a decree to create a single comprehensive registration law that covers all vital events;
- Establishing a single registration organization or a national administrative system for CRVS to oversee the registration of all types of vital events; and
- Standardizing registration processes from the national to the provincial and district levels.

MoHA drafted the Laos 2016–2025 CRVS Strategic Plan in March 2016. The prime minister endorsed the plan in May 2017. This strategy was the basis for developing a project that began to be implemented in 2020 with support from the World Bank.

The strategy's three goals are aligned with the Regional Action Framework for CRVS in Asia and the Pacific:

- Achieve universal civil registration of births, deaths, and other vital events;
- Provide all individuals with legal documentation of civil registration of births, deaths, and other vital events, as necessary, to claim identity, civil status, and ensuing rights; and
- Produce and disseminate accurate, complete, and timely vital statistics.

Budgetary allocations and requirements

Implementation of the CRVS strategy is financed by project funds from the World Bank. The total cost is US\$25 million:

- Component 1: Strengthening the Provision and Use of Civil Registration Services: \$21.3 million
- Component 2: Monitoring and Impact Evaluation: \$1 million
- Component 3: Project Management: \$2.7 million

Activities identified as high priorities

The implementation of the 2016–2025 CRVS strategy calls for long-term commitment and effort by multiple governmental agencies and continuing support from development partners and donors. Key priorities that have been proposed for implementing this strategy include:

- Standardize notification, registration, and certification for birth and death registration;
- Reduce barriers to registration;
- Improve service provided to the population;
- Enhance community awareness of and demand for registration services; and
- Make available a national database for birth and death statistics.

Laos has relied on international development partners to support its national authorities as they move CRVS reforms forward. As noted, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, WHO, and Plan International have all provided support for the assessment and creation of the CRVS strategic plan. Implementing the strategy was possible thanks to an agreement for financing conditions by the World Bank. The World Bank also served as an advisor for project design and implementation, including mentoring during the implementation phase.

Conclusion

For the last 10 years, the Laos government has been working with development partners on defining policies to reform the national CRVS system. The government recognizes that the manual, paper-based civil registration business processes need to be overhauled. This will increase registration rates, the efficient processing of registered data, and the sharing of data to make it easier for people to access other services and for the government to produce vital statistics.

A CRVS project financed by the World Bank that started in 2020 will result in the civil registration system being computerized. It will also allow for digital interoperability between key government ICT systems through a database that will serve as the sole provider of up-to-date legal identity data. Along with other measures, the new value of civil registration records for government-provided services will likely generate higher demand for registration services and increase registration rates for vital events.



Resources

Websites

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific – Lao PDR:

getinthepicture.org/country/lao-pdr

Laos Statistics Bureau: lsb.gov.la/en/home

Ministry of Home Affairs: moha.gov.la

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